

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510 - 3505

April 18, 2020

President Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Trump:

As your Administration engages with public health experts and business leaders on strategies to safely reopen the economy, I write to encourage you to prioritize the following four principles: 1) widespread testing, 2) thorough contact tracing, 3) enforceable worker protections, and 4) effective isolation and quarantine measures. Together these elements will ensure that our nation reopens for business in a manner that saves lives and restores public confidence.

Widespread testing and aggressive contact tracing have been key pillars of successful public health responses to infectious disease outbreaks across the world for more than a century. The countries that have implemented highly successful COVID-19 control programs – like Germany, South Korea, and Singapore – all emphasized testing and contact tracing to effectively control and limit the impact of COVID-19, which helped their economies rebound faster. States like Massachusetts and cities like San Francisco are incorporating similar strategies to get their economies back on track.

Successfully replicating the enhanced screening, mitigation, and suppression practices that have helped to minimize the impact of COVID-19 in other countries – in combination with robust, enforceable worker protections – will not only help to save lives, but it will help safeguard the economy and expedite job growth as we crescendo out of this crisis. I encourage you to ensure the following essential provisions are included and sufficiently resourced prior to any Administration guidelines or efforts to relax social distancing guidelines and reopen the economy.

Testing: Before we send millions of workers back on to factory floors and into cubicles, we must ensure the U.S. has the infrastructure in place and supplies necessary to engage in widespread testing. It is essential that we scale up testing to a level that is sufficient to monitor and contribute to the control of COVID-19 in the U.S. prior to relaxing social distancing guidelines.

While the introduction of rapid, point-of-care testing will make this easier, the Administration must take all the necessary steps to ramp up U.S.-based manufacturing of necessary supplies, including swabs and reagent, to effectively scale up our domestic testing capacity. The U.S. is significantly behind other countries in our testing capacity. Senate Democrats [have a plan to ramp up testing in the U.S.](#), which includes recommendations from numerous public health experts, including former Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Commissioners Mark McClellan and Scott Gottlieb.

The only way to successfully return to business as normal is to prioritize the health and safety of our workers and communities. Doing so requires the U.S. to effectively and efficiently ramp up testing so that we can quickly identify those who have the virus or are at risk of having the virus, and protect those going to work and returning to work to prevent further spread of the virus.

Contact Tracing: Once we have the infrastructure in place to identify who has the virus and who may be at risk of contracting the virus, we can use this information to protect workers and prevent any further spread of COVID-19. The second essential step is investing in intensive contact tracing.

Effective contact tracing will require the hiring, training, and deploying of contact tracers who follow-up on every positive case to support effective isolation and quarantine measures. Whether the U.S. chooses to redeploy AmeriCorps volunteers to assist with contact tracing or partner with furloughed workers in communities across the U.S., intensive contact tracing will require a strong, scalable workforce that is sufficiently resourced and supported with appropriate guidance from public health professionals. The Administration should follow the [recommendations of the National Association of County and City Health Officials \(NACCHO\)](#) in building out the COVID-19 contact tracing capacity necessary to support the safe reopening of the U.S. economy.

Worker Protections: Testing for and tracing the spread of COVID-19 will not be enough if we do not use this data to protect all workers, including contact tracers, doctors, nurses, and health care staff in our hospitals, emergency responders, grocery store workers, farmworkers, meat and poultry processing plant workers, construction workers, transit workers, and many more. A comprehensive approach to reopening the economy requires robust, enforceable worker protections.

The federal government has an obligation to protect employees during this public health emergency. There is a current lack of consistency surrounding the monitoring of symptoms, sanitation practices, social distancing, personal protective equipment standards, and communication requirements, which is leading to COVID-19 diagnoses and deaths among frontline workers. To address these shortcomings, your Administration must quickly publish an Emergency Temporary Standard (ETS) that requires employers to implement comprehensive infectious disease exposure control plans to protect all workers from the coronavirus. OSHA must also commit to fully enforcing the ETS. A comprehensive ETS and its strong enforcement is critical to protecting workers, their families, and the public from the spread of the virus.

In addition, any ETS must be followed by a finalized, permanent standard that puts protective measures in place to ensure employers are prepared for and workers are protected from any future public health emergencies. Worker health is public health, and we must protect the health of workers to protect the public, particularly as the country contemplates reopening the economy.

Effective Isolation and Quarantine: Finally, we must facilitate more effective isolation and quarantine measures by providing safe places for people who have tested positively to isolate without any risk of spreading the virus to family members or others. Not everyone who tests positive for COVID-19 has the ability to safely self-isolate at home without risking further spread to family members, roommates, or others. The federal government must ensure states

have the resources and flexibility necessary to implement "smart" quarantine and isolation processes, and provide additional support directly to individuals so that they are able to quarantine or isolate safely and prevent spreading the virus to their family or others.

It is imperative your Administration ensure all individuals have the resources and support necessary to take care of themselves and protect their neighbors from COVID-19. To that end, the federal government must have a plan in place to ensure that those who test positive for COVID-19, especially vulnerable populations including individuals experiencing homelessness and other low-income individuals, are immediately connected to essential services and social supports. Doing so will not only help to prevent further spread of COVID-19, but it will help facilitate better care for individuals who are diagnosed with the virus by ensuring they are connected to medical services and the resources necessary to isolate safely.

If we do these four things successfully: 1) ramp up testing, 2) implement large-scale contact tracing, 3) enforce strong worker protections, and 4) provide support for effective, supported isolation and quarantine, we can bend the curve, stem the tide of this epidemic, and get our economy back on track.

It is never too late to engage in a robust public health approach to stopping COVID-19. However, it is past time for us to go on the offensive against the coronavirus. My colleagues and I in Congress are ready to work with you to ensure your Administration has the authorities and the funding necessary to reopen our economy in a manner informed by public health experts.

Sincerely,



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator

CC: The Honorable Mike Pence, Vice President of the United States
The Honorable Alex Azar, Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services
The Honorable Eugene Scalia, Secretary of the Department of Labor
Dr. Robert R. Redfield, Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Mr. Peter T. Gaynor, Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency